

AMENDMENTS TO THE CLAIMS

Claim 1 (currently amended): A method for initiating communication in real-time between users in a multi-user communication environment, the method comprising:

providing a unique code generated by a multi-user communication environment to a first user in the multi-user communication environment during communication between the first user and at least one other user via an exchange of words from a menu of predetermined words between the first user and the at least one other user, the code being transmitted by from the first user to the at least one other user via a mode outside of the multi-user communication environment;

initiating secure free form communication between the users upon the unique code being authenticated in the multi-user communication environment after the unique code is submitted to the multi-user communication environment by from the at least one other user.

Claim 2 (original): The method according to claim 1, wherein the unique code is provided by the multi-user communication environment.

Claim 3 (original): The method according to claim 2, wherein the multi-user communication environment is an online multiplayer gaming environment.

Claim 4 (original): The method according to claim 1, wherein the code is transmitted by the first user through at least one of an email program, a telephone conversation, a handwritten note, a chat room program, direct communication, a instant message program, and a facsimile.

Claim 5 (previously presented): The method according to claim 1, wherein the first user initiates real-time and secure communication with the at least one other user after the code is authenticated in the multi-user communication environment.

Claim 6 (original): The method according to claim 1, wherein the code comprises a sequence of symbols.

Claim 7 (original): The method according to claim 1, wherein the code comprises a sequence of alpha-numeric symbols.

Claims 8 - 23 (canceled)

Claim 24 (currently amended): A computer readable media having instructions for facilitating secure communication in real-time between users in a multi-user communication environment, the instructions performing steps comprising:

allowing enabling the users to communicate within the multi-user communication environment by exchanging words selected from a menu of pre-determined words;

providing a unique code generated by the multi-user communications environment to a first user in the multi-user communications environment while the predetermined word communications are being exchanged between the users, wherein the unique code transmitted by from the first user to at least one other user is transmitted via a mode outside of the multi-user communication environment; and

~~allowing enabling the free form communications between the users upon at least one other user submitting the unique code generated by the multi-user environment to the multi-user communications environment for authenticating the unique code with the multi-user communication environment~~ the unique code being authenticated in the multi-user communication environment after the unique code is submitted to the multi-user communication environment from the at least one other user.

Claim 25 (previously presented): The computer readable media according to claim 24, wherein the unique code is a random sequence of symbols generated by the multi-user environment.

Claim 26 (previously presented): The computer readable media according to claim 24, wherein the multi-user environment is an online multiplayer gaming environment.

Claim 27 (previously presented): The computer readable media according to claim 24, wherein the unique code is provided in response to a request by the first one of the two users.

Claim 28 (previously presented): The computer readable media according to claim 24, wherein the unique code is valid for a limited period of time.

Claims 29 - 43 (canceled)

Claim 44 (Currently amended): A method for initiating free form communication between a plurality of users in a multi-user gaming environment via an exchange of words selected from a menu of predetermined words determined by the gaming environment, the method comprising:

establishing predetermined word communication via an exchange of words selected from the menu between a first user and at least one second user in the multi-user gaming environment;

providing a unique code generated by the multi-user gaming environment to [[a]] the first user in the multi-user gaming environment during the exchange of words selected from the menu of predetermined words between the first user and at least the at least one second user;

the first user transmitting the unique code to the at least one second user via a mode outside of the multi-user gaming environment;

the at least second user receiving the unique code from the first at least one second user;

the at least second user submitting the unique code to the multi-user gaming environment for authentication; and

the environment permitting the first and at least second users to thereafter communicate via free form secure communication when the code has been authenticated by the multi-user gaming environment.

Claim 45 (previously presented): The method of claim 44 wherein the menu of predetermined words includes a predetermined set of word commands.

Claim 46 (previously presented): The method according to claim 44, wherein the unique code is provided in response to a request by one of the users.

Claim 47 (previously presented): The method according to claim 44, wherein the unique code is valid only for a limited period of time.

48. (New) A method for initiating secure free form communication between users in a multi-user gaming environment in which communication is restricted to an exchange of words selected from a menu of predetermined words provided by the gaming environment, the method comprising:

providing a unique code generated by the gaming environment, during the exchange of words selected from the menu of predetermined words between a first and at least one second user, to the first user in the gaming environment upon request by the first user;

transmitting the unique code to the second user from the first user via a mode outside of the gaming environment;

receiving the unique code in the gaming environment for authentication of the second user by the gaming environment;

permitting the first and second users to communicate via free form secure communication when the code is authenticated by the multi-user gaming environment.

49. (New) The method of claim 48 wherein the gaming environment is facilitated on a server connected to the Internet.

50. (New) The method of claim 48 wherein the request by the first user is provided in response to a query presented to the first user by the gaming environment.

51. (New) The method of claim 50 wherein the unique code is valid for a predetermined period of time.

52. (New) A computer readable media having instructions for facilitating secure free form communication in real time between users in a multi-user gaming environment that restricts communication between users in the gaming environment to exchange of words selected from a menu of predetermined words provided by the gaming environment, the instructions performing steps comprising:

providing a unique code generated by the gaming environment, during the exchange of words selected from the menu of predetermined words between a first and second user, to only the first user in the gaming environment upon request by the first user;

restricting transmission of the unique code to the second user to a mode outside of the gaming environment;

permitting the first and second users to communicate via free form secure communication upon receipt of the code from the second user and authentication of the unique code by the multi-user gaming environment.

53. (New) The media of claim 52 wherein the gaming environment is facilitated on a server connected to the Internet.

54. (New) The media of claim 52 wherein the request by the first user is provided in response to a query presented to the first user by the gaming environment.

55. (New) The media of claim 52 wherein the unique code is valid for a predetermined period of time.

56. (New) A system for initiating secure free form communication between users in a multi-user gaming environment, the system comprising:

a server configured to provide to users via a network to which the users are connected a multi-user gaming environment having communication between users initially restricted to an exchange of words selected from a menu of predetermined words provided by the gaming environment;

the server being further configured to provide a unique code generated by the gaming environment, during the exchange of words selected from the menu of predetermined words between a first and at least a second user, to only the first user in the gaming environment upon request by the first user, restrict transmission of the unique code to the second user to a mode outside of the gaming environment, and permit the first and second users to communicate via

free form secure communication upon receipt of the unique code from the second user and authentication of the unique code by the multi-user gaming environment.

57. (New) The system of claim 56 wherein the request by the first user is provided in response to a query presented to the first user by the gaming environment.

58. (New) The system of claim 56 wherein the unique code is valid for a predetermined period of time.